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The Changeling and the Carnavalesque

One of the features of Jacobean Drama generally, and the play *The Changeling* specifically, is its polysemous nature. There are multiple and complex strands in the composition of the play, which can render multiple interpretations. Critics, though, in making their arguments, sometimes ignore those elements which are not conducive to their position. *The Changeling* has been the genesis of such criticism in which obvious elements of the drama are omitted, for they don't support the argument being made. The very complexity of this play, which richly absorbs the issues of the times in which it was written, can make it simultaneously fecund and unwieldy for critical interpretations. As Cristina Malcolmson has pointed out in her essay " 'As Tame as the Ladies': Politics and Gender in *The Changeling*," only months before the first production of Middleton and Rowley's play in May of 1622, King James had several members of parliament imprisoned for their opposition to the marriage of his son Charles to the Spanish Infanta, and *The Changeling* paints a rather jaundiced view of the Spanish. As Annabel Patterson

writes in her wonderful introduction to *The Changeling*: the play “permitted its original audiences to intuit a connection between Spanish/Catholic interests, crimes of violence, and sexuality out of control” (1635). It has therefore been argued that the play was likely a veiled criticism of the King’s decision to draw the two kingdoms into closer connection. In addition to the above examples showing how *The Changeling* has connections with national and international concerns, there is a more lurid issue of that day associated with it: the Frances Howard scandal. While the examination she (or, as many suspected, a proxy) underwent to prove her virginity and thus be granted an annulment from the Duke of Essex happened in 1613, this scandal was still fresh in the public’s consciousness in 1622, not the least because within months prior to the first production of *The Changeling*, Howard and her husband Robert Carr -- a one-time favorite of King James -- were released from their imprisonment for the murder of Thomas Overbury. His murder was occasioned by Overbury’s opposition to the Carr-Howard marriage. Besides these obvious issues, either sensational or of national importance, the play raises the concerns of that day more generally: the issue of enforced marriages, men’s anxiety with being cuckolded, and master and servant relations.

As Madeline Bassnett has pointed out in her essay, “‘A Frightful Pleasure, That is All’: Wonder, Monstrosity and *The Changeling*,” most of the criticism of the play deals with one of three things: 1) the identity of the “changeling,” 2) the relation between the main plot and the subplot, and 3) the moral vision of the play (388). However, this paper argues that there is a profuse scattering of the carnivalesque which adorns the entirety of the play: the use of billingsgate, folk humor, inversions, uncrowning in various ways, animal imagery suggestive of carnival, sexualized banter,

disguises, banquet imagery, the “carnivalizing” of death, and most generally a profligate use of the ludic or playfulness. Though much of the carnivalesque is most obvious in the madhouse subplot, it is also perceptible in the main plot. The term “carnavalesque” is used here in the broadest possible sense, so that various elements found in concentrated form in the carnival setting, like billingsgate -- “vulgarized language and popular scurrility”¹ -- uncrowning, disguises, unrestrained behavior, folk humor and so forth, can be studied at times in isolation. While an actual festival, with its own place and freedom from the repressive elements of the day, is not shown in the play, there are elements of a folk culture which flourished profusely during carnival and were alive the year-long in certain spaces such as the marketplace. When writing about carnival, Mikhail Bakhtin observes that, “in all the great writings of the Renaissance we clearly sense the carnival atmosphere, the free winds blowing from the marketplace” (275). While this remark refers specifically to the Renaissance, Bakhtin speaks of the procession and development of the carnivalesque which found its greatest flourishing in Rabelais’ writings, but it also appears in Shakespeare and Cervantes’ writings as well. Bakhtin asserts that “Renaissance grotesque imagery, directly related to folk carnival culture, as we find it in Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, influenced the entire realistic literature of the following centuries” (52).

Mark Thornton Burnett refers to some of these elements when he cites the use of billingsgate in his essay, “*The Changeling* and Masters and Servants,” as well as certain animal imagery which is suggestive of carnival. Most importantly, however, he writes about the inversions that take place in *The Changeling* and how these connect to carnival. However, the main thrust of Burnett’s argument is that there were major disruptions in

¹ This definition comes from Mark Thornton Burnett’s essay “*The Changeling* and Masters and Servants.”

the master and servant institution of the early modern period and that *The Changeling* directs our attention to the loci of power relations of the time, inviting the audience to reflect on the problems inherent in such relations. He argues that inversion, which is an element of the carnivalesque, is a tool utilized in the play. My contention is that the carnivalesque is so prevalent in the drama that it should not be assessed merely as a technique employed by one character -- in this case by De Flores, as Burnett argues in his essay -- for his own purposes. It is instead integral to the play's conception. Indeed, Burnett hardly touches upon the most carnivalesque aspect of the play, the madhouse scenes. These scenes are overlooked by much of the criticism, given short shrift, as if they were an unnecessary adjunct to the "real" play. This is a mistake, for by overlooking these scenes and obfuscating the obvious ludic aspects of the drama, one creates an ahistorical vision of the work and, too often, provokes ahistorical criticism. As Patterson wrote in her introduction to *The Changeling*, the two plots suggest that "the madhouse is coextensive with the nation" (1635). Therefore, without these two plots conjoined, the sense of the nation as madhouse (with the obvious connections to carnival) is lost.

It is my view that without understanding the profound and profuse nature of folk humor and culture -- those things which in their most intense form comprise the carnival -- which run (indeed, caper) throughout *The Changeling*, one is missing a whole dimension of the play. Yes, *The Changeling* is a tragedy, but it is one infused with the spirit of early modern times. It quite consciously provokes a certain spirit -- most obviously, though not exclusively, via the madhouse scenes -- of folk humor and folk culture. Thus, a sense of the carnivalesque colors the entire work, muting, to an extent,

the tragic elements, and drawing out the comic aspects, the hilarity of the crowd and its vast optimism.

In early modern England, the theater's very space and function promoted a sense of festival and, for some, thereby caused anxiety. In discussing the criticism of theater that took place in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, Bristol writes that "[w]hile 'amateur' performances that actually coincide with holidays may be tolerable, a public playhouse that offers to provide a holiday experience without a formal liturgical sanction is clearly a "resort of idleness" (112). He claims that modern day scholars believe "that opponents of theater were a vocal minority" (108). But there was another aspect to the theater of early modern England which created at least one feature -- and this with profound implications which shall be discussed in further detail later -- of carnival or festivity: the pressing together of many bodies. Bakhtin discusses the effect of the "carnavalesque crowd" (255) on the psyche of the individual. According to him "[T]he pressing throng, the physical contact of bodies, acquires a certain meaning. The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people's mass body" (255). This sense of being a member of a mass body is one of the aspects which conditioned the commoners' consciousness, creating a strong sense of optimism. Death could be less fearful when there was the carnal sense of immortality: individuals die, but the mass body continues. And while this feature -- "the pressing throng" -- is not specific to theater, it is quite clear that Bakhtin meant to include the theater as well in his discussion, for he cites Goethe's vision of an amphitheater in Verona that he was visiting, a vision of it crowded in ancient times, with bodies pressed together, just a paragraph below the passage quoted. Goethe's vision indicates the

phenomenon of the consciousness of the throng and refers to the people in the theater becoming “welded into one mass, a single body animated by a single spirit” (255).

Theater then in the Jacobean age, with groundlings tightly packed into the space immediately below the stage, had these carnivalesque elements, “the pressing throng” and the sense of being part of “an indissoluble part of the collectivity” (255).

Therefore the very nature of the theater in Jacobean times promoted a consciousness distinct from that of a modern sensibility. The press of the bodies of the groundlings would have created, according to Bakhtin’s belief, a sense of the people’s “uninterrupted continuity within time, of its relative historic immortality” (255). There was also, as Michael D. Bristol points out, a “holiday experience” to the early modern theater, one that also provoked anxiety for some due to staged plays being unauthorized by work or church. These aspects of the theater in early modern England are important to bear in mind for all of the plays of the time, for without that imaginative re-creation of this consciousness certain aspects of the dramas, such as the way death was frequently treated, billingsgate, uncrowning, inversions and so forth, can be misinterpreted.

However, for some plays the ludic aspects are so pronounced -- and *The Changeling* with its madhouse scenes is one such play -- that carnival (in the broadest possible sense of the word) is quite clearly manifested. Bristol argues as much when he cites the use of “clowns” in tragedies. Antonio, who plays a fool so that he can be admitted to a madhouse in order to seduce another man’s wife, smacks of a clown. Bristol writes: “Discovery and disclosure of laughing matter is a special and privileged function of clowns, whose presence turns even the most serious drama into ‘mungrell tragi-comedy’”

(140).² Therefore, with the clownish behavior of Antonio and his cohort in the madhouse, Franciscus, the “discovering” or uncovering of laughing matter is presented in this play. This laughing matter, which also has clear parallels in the main plot, then makes Middleton and Rowley’s drama something other than a pure tragedy. At moments at least it could be likened to what Sidney termed and Bristol referred to as a “mungrell tragi-comedy.”

This essay then will highlight the elements of the carnivalesque which thread their way through *The Changeling*. It will point out how at least some of those elements appear in both the madhouse scenes and the main plot, thereby suggesting the ludic strain operating in, and animating, both plots. The essay will then conclude by returning to the moral vision that the play expresses. This vision, while related to the Christian view of sin and punishment as some critics have noted,³ also has some significant distinctions. There are class issues which are relevant to the moral vision as well.

The most obvious elements of the carnivalesque in *The Changeling* occur in the madhouse subplot. The very idea of the plot is rather like a wild caper by young men. Two servants not only disguise themselves to be admitted into a madhouse in order to seduce another man’s wife, but they must devise an excuse to carve out a space of time from their official responsibilities. As Vermandero says of Antonio and Franciscus, “They both feigned a journey / To Briamata, and so wrought out their leaves” (5.2.80-1). He says this when he learns that the two did not in fact go to Briamata but disguised themselves to enter the madhouse, and that this “leave” they took coincided with the day

² He references Sir Philip Sidney’s work *An Apologie for Poetry*, and states that Sidney “criticize[d] the mixed decorum of early Elizabethan plays that ‘be neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies’” (126).

³ The critic N.W. Bawcutt, for example, stated that “the moral world” of *The Changeling* “is the orthodox Christian universe of sin and punishment.” (Patterson 1632)

of the murder of Piracquo. This “space” of time, however, that these two characters create for themselves is also an expression of a “truth,” for “madness,” as Bahktin explains in his introduction, “is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official ‘truth’” (39). These truths don’t fit into what is officially sanctioned by the work-a-day world or by the church, much as the theater in Middleton and Rowley’s time did not. These truths involve the ludic: disguises and role playing, giving expression to sexuality outside of what is officially sanctioned, and “uncrowning.”

Some of the features of the carnivalesque that occur in the madhouse subplot are disguises, attempted cuckoldry, billingsgate humor, sexualized banter and, quite simply, the ludicrous. As Bristol puts it, “ludicrous misrepresentations of classical literature and popular legend, are all common Carnival devices” (177). All of these elements are sometimes found in carnival. In such a setting, where a space of freedom has been carved out amid society’s proscriptions, these features come together in a gay profusion. It is this heightened or intensified expression of these elements which denotes carnival. However, when carnival ceases, it does not mean that all the features that made it what it was are completely held in abeyance until the next festival. Most assuredly not! The yearning to express a freedom of the personality is too strong, so it finds its way into the mundane world too.

Taking the last in the series of these features first, it becomes quite apparent how prominent this ludicrous strain is in various scenes in the subplot. However, the ludicrous or ridiculous can also be put on for effect and be an expression, among other things, of the ludic. For example, when Isabella first comes into contact with Franciscus, the counterfeit madman, he proffers an imaginary cup to Lollo and says, “Anacreon,

drink to my mistress' / health" (3.3.44-5). The stage directions tell the reader that "Lollo laughs" (3.3.47). The commentary note to this speech says, in part, that references to classical figures "may play on contemporary tavern culture" (3.3.44n). A character disguised as a madman, the mission he is on, the absurdity of offering an imaginary drink, wildly mistaking Lollo's identity, referring to him instead as a famous Greek lyric poet, the laughter this remark provokes from Lollo and the possibility of such references "playing" on tavern culture -- clearly issue the audience into the carnival nature of what is going on. At the same time, the fabric of the play is "polysemous," allowing for divergent interpretations regarding this material. So it is that Isabella draws the audience's attention to another response: "Alack, alack, 'tis too full of pity/ To be laughed at" (3.3.48-9). The audience knows that Franciscus is only feigning his madness, and so they can remain untroubled by this particular manifestation of a real social problem. Indeed, they laugh at his imitation of it.

Shortly after these lines, Franciscus approaches Isabella and says:

Hail, bright Titania!

Why standest thou idle on these flow'ry banks?

Oberon is dancing with his Dryades. (3.3.54-7)

Not only is this humorous as a "ludicrous misrepresentation of classical literature and popular legend" when Isabella is addressed as Titania, but it also clearly refers, as the commentary note states on page 1653, to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This reference highlights the carnivalesque nature of what is going on in the madhouse scenes by alluding to Shakespeare's comedy. Since the allusion is to a comedy, it imports another layer of the comedic sensibility into the madhouse scene. The animal

imagery and the lower bodily stratum in terms of the sexual parings-off that are evoked by the allusion are also elements of the carnivalesque. In addition to these more general aspects in reference to Shakespeare's comedy, there is the specific allusion to sexual impropriety. The commentary note to this passage says that Franciscus's reference to "Oberon dancing with his Dryades" is "hint[ing] to Isabella that Alibius is 'dancing' (= copulating) with other women" (3.3.56n). In this one allusion are found several aspects of the carnivalesque: the lower bodily stratum in terms of sexual behavior, unrestraint in the sense of losing self-control and committing adultery, and the ludic, in that Franciscus' whole goal is to cuckold another man, which he's doing by disguising himself, playing at being a madman, and making absurd allusions to classical and literary references. There quite clearly are parallels to what is occurring in the main plot also. De Flores is trying to be-whore a woman betrothed to another man, and all the while his "disguise" is that of a dutiful servant.⁴

There are numerous other ludicrous misrepresentations of the classical world in the play, but I will cite only one more, this one occurring in the main plot and showing another of the strands that connect the madhouse world and its carnivalesque nature to the main narrative. When Beatrice-Joanna has been snooping around in Alsemero's closet, shortly after the marriage which was portrayed in the dumb show, Diaphanta enters and tells her mistress that Alsemero is out in the park. She then says of him:

Ay, madam, let him compass

Whole parks and forests, as great rangers do;

At roosting time a little lodge can hold 'em.

⁴ In the beginning of the play Beatrice-Joanna tells Alsemero that De Flores is a "gentleman" who is "In good respect with my father, and follows him" (1.1.135), so although he is a servant, he is also a

(Sings) Earth-conquering Alexander,
 That thought the world too narrow for him,
 In the end had but his pit-hole. (4.1.60-5)

Not only is this clearly ridiculous in linking Alsemero to Alexander the Great, but moreover the audience knows that Alsemero has been cuckolded by a servant. There's also the playful aspect of Diaphanta singing a ditty about Alexander. In addition there are double entendres that Diaphanta employs which function, in part at least, as degrading this prominent figure of the classical world, for this great conqueror is presented in terms of the "little lodge" that can hold him. The reference to his end being linked to a "pit-hole," which the commentary note suggests plays a dual function as drawing attention to the grave, the common end of all mankind, and suggesting a "sexual orifice" (4.1.65n), also evokes what Bahktin refers to as the "lower bodily stratum." But this comical degrading, this ludic "grotesque-ifying" of an honored classical personage, not only mirrors what has been going on in the main plot, the degrading of Beatrice-Joanna, but it is another internal sign of the spirit that infuses the work: nothing is sacred, all can be mocked and derided; great kings and rulers are ruled in their turn by the lower bodily stratum; and in the end Alexander had his pit-hole. Put another way, if Alexander the Great can be degraded and laughed at, his entire life summed up in a ditty with double entendres, how much more so can Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero be derided?

One of the effects of ludicrous misrepresentations of the classical world is to draw attention to the material reality of things by suggesting something finer, richer, and more illustrious. The ludicrous comparisons highlight the events in the drama, drawing the

focus to the physicality of the present, with all of its attendant facts (including that Alsemero now wears the horns of one who has been cuckolded). These wildly inaccurate ascriptions to classical prestige are one way of de-idealizing, which is what the carnivalesque does in a myriad of ways. It brings things down to the material bodily principle, and in this way, ironically, it achieves a species of idealistic thought by making all people, kings and paupers, equal.

Since the aspects of disguise and attempted cuckoldry in the madhouse subplot are self evident (Franciscus and Antonio play at being a madman and a fool respectively, and their purpose is to get close to Isabella and seduce her), it is not necessary to elaborate on these points. This is a ludic prank which occurs outside of all official sanction: the characters are in the suspended state of carnival's a radical freedom from the societal hierarchies and repressive elements of church and state. In this caper in which they are engaged, Franciscus and Antonio are avoiding service to their lord and, in terms of the church, are also avoiding service to their Lord.

The notion of laughter during the medieval and early modern period is also relevant. A brief sketch of its place among the people of the time will help illustrate the humor that threads its way through *The Changeling* and, more specifically, how billingsgate was probably understood. According to Bahktin, the intellectuals of the middle ages and early modern period, including Rabelais, knew of the rich classical thought about the value of laughter. Homer wrote about the eternal laughter of the gods (70). Lycurgus had a statue erected in honor of laughter, referring to it as a gift from the immortals; and the ancient Egyptians had a notion that the world was created by God's laughter. How common these ideas were to the average person is hard to say. But

Bakhtin does stress that “the characteristic trait of laughter was precisely the recognition of its positive, regenerating, creative meaning” (71). This implies that laughter was intimately linked with the negative, degenerating, and baneful, because for regeneration to occur there needs to have been a prior degeneration or stasis. Laughter disrupts, at least temporarily, the stasis and vents anxieties and repressed elements in the psyche.

Regarding folk humor, Bakhtin writes that during the Middle Ages it “developed outside the official sphere of high ideology” and so “it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness” (71). This understanding of humor and laughter still applied during the early modern period.⁵ Laughter held great regenerative power. It was a fuller laughter (or sense of humor), for it was ambivalent: implied in its very regenerative power, for example, is the notion of death, of leveling. And the freedom and the ruthlessness of humor/laughter came about, at least in part, in response to a strict official culture. The humor and laughter from the folk culture allowed for a fuller expression of humanity since it offered means by which one could express the instinctual side of life. It allowed for celebrating the visceral reality of the material and lower bodily stratum.⁶

Billingsgate can be understood within this framework. It applied not simply to verbal insults but held humor and even regenerative power, for it opened up a space for radical freedom from official forms of discourse and a ponderous etiquette. This

⁵ While the above quote specifically cites the Middle Ages, Bakhtin is showing a development of folk humor generally which found its greatest expression, he contends, in Rabelais but that also appears in the writings of others, such as Shakespeare and Cervantes. For example, Bakhtin writes: “By the end of the Middle Ages a gradual disappearance of the dividing line between humor and great literature can be observed” (97).

⁶ It should be noted that Bakhtin argues that laughter/humor is not the same in every age. He cites Voltaire for one of his examples. He asserts that for Voltaire “laughter is reduced to bare mockery. Such is precisely the famous ‘laughter of Voltaire’; its force is almost entirely deprived of the regenerating and renewing element. All that is positive is placed beyond the sphere of laughter and represents an abstract

freedom, this sudden and sometimes furious eruption of the truth of one's sentiments, plays its role in the degrading effect which is such a large part of carnival. Degrading and deriding not only provide delight in the suddenness of a fall -- in this case a sort of verbal slapstick -- but they also provide for rebirth, for new relations, not based on stations and roles, but on a richer and fuller understanding of the human consciousness with its radical freedom -- a freedom that becomes manifest during verbal attacks. For example, soon after Beatrice-Joanna has sent a message to Alsemero through his friend Jasperino, De Flores approaches her. The sudden explosive attack Beatrice-Joanna fires at De Flores when she says, "Thou standing toad-pool!" (2.1.57) gives insight into the freedom of a consciousness that is not limited by society's strictures. Beatrice-Joanna's emotional outburst, so far from proper decorum, provides an insight into the reality of complex emotional states that are often hidden behind forms of discourse sanctioned by society. This sharp and sudden exposure of a more complicated emotional reality behind the norms of intercourse is one of the reasons that billingsgate provokes laughter.

While by far the most significant amount of billingsgate in *The Changeling* takes place in the main plot, where Beatrice-Joanna fires volleys at De Flores, much of the carnivalesque is most pronounced in the madhouse scenes. The use of billingsgate in these scenes then connects the humor of scurrilous verbal assaults to those events which are liberally strewn throughout the main plot. These elements most definitely mute the harsh and tragic aspects of the main plot by giving it some of the ambivalence of the folk humor of the times.

In the third act of the play *Lollio*, after seeing Antonio attempting to seduce Isabella, tries to kiss his mistress. He wants to sleep with his master's wife and cuckold

Alibius. Isabella's violent outburst must be understood in this ridiculous series of events. She says: "You bold slave, you!" (3.3.243). In this scene of disguises, which includes spying (Lollio coming unawares on Antonio's disclosure to Isabella of his intent) and attempted cuckoldry by more than one man, there is a comical profusion of unrestrained behavior. It is in this context that Isabella's derisive outburst must be understood -- it is one further aspect of hilarity. In part this billingsgate is funny by its exaggeration. In a short sentence she simultaneously does two things: degrades Lollio to the basest of conditions, making him a slave, and by doing so she radically elevates her own position. This response has a further humorous complication since we know that Lollio, at the behest of Alibius, is really the one keeping her locked up.

However, the vast majority of the billingsgate that occurs in the play issues from Beatrice-Joanna and is directed at De Flores. In the first scene of the second act De Flores, as is his wont, devises reasons to speak with Beatrice-Joanna. Her attack on him, "Thou thing most loathed, what cause was there in / this / To bring thee to my sight?" (2.1.72-3), falls outside the normative speech patterns for master and servant relations; it is not the normal etiquette for male and female interactions among equals; and it is most definitely not sanctioned by church ideology. There is, then, an unofficial, radically free, even "market-place" argot, or idiom used by a particular group, in this case relevant to plebian culture, which is conveyed in the play. This notion of the market is significant, for it is precisely this idea of buying and selling services which will obtain between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores. She will purchase his service for the murder of Alonzo de Piracquo; and he will obtain payment from her by being "serviced." The pun

on the word "service" indeed comes up later in the play.⁷

But the humor in this scene, which is oft misunderstood, is even more layered, as well as philosophically significant. De Flores knows he's going to be verbally blasted, for he says some few lines earlier, "Now't begins again; / I'll stand this storm of hail though the stones pelt me" (2.1.54-5). He willingly enters into a situation in which he will be humiliated. From one perspective this choice can be viewed as masochistic. However, from another perspective it can be seen as behavior appropriate to a fool and smacks of "verbal slapstick." But there is an even greater richness taking place in the event. By engaging in such scurrilous attacks Beatrice-Joanna is, in a sense, socially degrading herself as well as De Flores.

Beatrice-Joanna is also foreshadowing her own significant degradation by being be-whored by De Flores. This behavior -- her use of billingsgate -- in some ways exculpates De Flores for those watching the play, since the majority of the original audience was likely commoners who would get some enjoyment from seeing an abusive member of the aristocracy have the tables turned on her. It also seems likely that one of the things which keeps drawing De Flores to Beatrice-Joanna is that she doesn't behave in accordance with the strictest propriety. If she did, then he would have very little to connect with. She would be inhabiting the station she is entitled to and the two of them would engage in the discourse of their conventional roles. By stepping outside of proper master-servant relations, she opens up a certain freedom in her own discourse that

⁷ In Act Two, scene two where Beatrice-Joanna is working on getting De Flores to murder Piracquo, the word "service" is used four times: 2.2.93; 2.2.118; 2.2.120; and 2.2.142. These repetitions of the word highlight its significance. Then, in 3.4 when De Flores returns after completing his mission and seeking his payment -- in flesh, as it were -- he says: "All things are answerable: time, / Circumstance, your wishes, and my service" (3.4.21-2). The connection of "service" with sexual recompense is therefore strongly implied.

enables De Flores to develop a greater intimacy with her.

This point is distinct from what other critics have sometimes noted:

Beatrice-Joanna's unconscious attraction to De Flores. In Joost Daalder and Antony Telford Moore's wonderful essay, "'There's Scarce A Thing But Is Both Loved And Loathed': *The Changeling* I.I.91-129," the authors delve into the psychological make-up of the love triangle of Beatrice-Joanna, De Flores, and Alsemero. They convincingly show that Alsemero has an unconscious loathing of sexuality -- his poison, for example, he tells Beatrice-Joanna, is something she might desire: a "cherry" -- and, that Beatrice-Joanna has a strong sexual attraction to De Flores.⁸ They describe the attraction to De Flores claiming that "in Freudian terms, she "represses" it, but it cannot go away, and overwhelms her with the more force" (507). However, while the billingsgate she uses could be expressive of simultaneous attraction/repulsion, the audience need not know what feelings are "behind" her words. The abuse she heaps on De Flores (and that he seeks out) simultaneously degrades both of them, and this degradation, this freedom from the most punctilious adherence to their mutual roles, opens up a space for De Flores to greater action. He senses the opportunity here and keeps seeking it out, suspecting, rightly it turns out, that further opportunities might be possible.

The aura of comedy that surrounds the relationship between De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna has often been missed in the critical literature. Some of the black humor, of course, has already been discussed by others. Piracquo's finger still in the ring, for

⁸ In the first scene of Act One Beatrice-Joanna explains to Alsemero that she does not know why she so strongly dislikes De Flores. She says: "Nor can I other reason render you, / Than his or hers, of some particular thing / They must abandon as a deadly poison" (1.1.110-13). Alsemero understands, and cites a list of things some people dislike. All the things he lists, interestingly enough, are associated with sensual delights (roses, oil, wine). Beatrice Joanna then asks: "And what may be your poison, sir? I am bold with you" (1.1.128).

example, that De Flores returns to Beatrice-Joanna and its obvious reference to castration, as well as its allusion to Alibius's line where it refers to a fear of cuckoldry. In that scene in the madhouse, Alibius says: "I would wear my ring on my own finger: / Whilst it is borrowed it is none of mine, / But his that useth it" (1.1.27-29). There is also a play on the courtly romance here, which will be elaborated on more fully, where the lady bestows a favor on her champion. Here then multiple meanings, all with some humorous connections, congregate around this image of the ring and the finger. Too often the critical literature not only misses the sometimes subtle humor which is generated by the relationship between the damsel of the castle and the pock-faced gentleman servant, but even powerfully misconstrues the relationship as a whole. This, perhaps, is due to societal values placed on male and female relations.

In his essay "The Transformation of De Flores in *The Changeling*," Charles W. Crupi makes it quite clear that De Flores is far more interesting than many critics give him credit for. Too often he is seen as simply a foul-visaged villain, his ugly appearance betraying his inner corruption. However, Crupi argues that Beatrice-Joanna is at least as corrupt as De Flores. He further shows that De Flores is not simply a villain but rather undergoes a significant moral degeneration as well. Crupi points out that "[t]he idea of murdering Piracquo springs full-blown from her own vision of what is desirable" (142). She is the one who incites De Flores to murder Piracquo. Crupi then confronts the way some critics, like Helen Gardner, have likened Beatrice-Joanna to Faustus and Macbeth, tracing her moral degeneration. However, he points out that, unlike these characters, Beatrice-Joanna "undergoes no inner debate, feels no self-doubt, engages in no careful scrutiny of alternatives. Later, she will feel no guilt" (142).

De Flores is also far more complex than critics have sometimes given him credit for. At one place in the play he likens himself to "a Common Garden Bull" (2.1.79). Crupi claims that De Flores "is driven to a state of blind bestiality which strips him of intelligence and humanity" (144). He also points out that it is De Flores who sees the ghost of Piracquo, not Beatrice-Joanna. Furthermore, De Flores cannot duel Tomazo, for he sees "his brother's wounds / Fresh bleeding in his eye, as in a Crystall" (5.2.32-33). A sense of his own guilt for murdering an innocent man -- again, a sentiment which Beatrice-Joanna never betrays -- keeps him from raising a violent hand against the brother of him who he murdered. It is De Flores who can say at the end of the play, when there is nothing left to lose or gain, "I loved this woman in spite of her heart" (5.3.165). De Flores, then, in order to gain something he powerfully desired, committed a crime, the murder of Piracquo, that was first suggested to him by Beatrice-Joanna. This dark deed, however, is something about which he experiences pangs of conscience.

In contrast to Crupi, Robert Jordan details a mythic strain inherent in the relationship between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, a relationship of the Beauty and the Beast. Jordan points out that many critics focus on the psychological sophistication of the main characters, including De Flores, but he asserts that their central relationship can be "simplified down to a few qualities apiece so that the relationship itself takes on a monumental simplicity -- brutishness and love at the feet of beauty and revulsion" (159). Jordan develops his claim for this mythic substratum by showing how the travesty of the courtly love relationship, which obtains between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, has been detailed by other scholars.⁹ He then asserts that this "is an echo of that very popular

⁹ Jordan cites Robert Ornstein's *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* as detailing how in "the first three acts of *The Changeling* the De Flores -- Beatrice relationship is quite consciously and systematically

medieval and Renaissance motif, the wild man and the maiden" (162). What's most interesting about Jordan's analysis for my approach is not so much what he cogently argues, the mythic substratum, but rather the obvious travesty of the courtly romance that takes place in *The Changeling*. What follows are some of the salient points of this mockery as Jordan describes it: 1) There is the "travesty of the doting lovesick knight being spurned by his cruel and haughty mistress" (160). This is a ludicrous misrepresentation since De Flores is a servant, not a knight. 2) There comes a "first sign of grace -- the lady drops a glove" (160). While this is arguably an ambivalent event in *The Changeling*, one of the ways of reading the scene is that Beatrice-Joanna drops the glove for Alsemero, and yet an interloper takes possession of it. Even the ambiguity makes humor of the situation. 3) The "ever attentive knight recovers [the glove] for her and which the lady allows him to keep as a favor" (160). Again, De Flores isn't a knight, and one of the interpretations is that Beatrice-Joanna doesn't "allow him to keep it as a favor" but rather is repulsed by the notion that what his skin touched should then touch hers.¹⁰ 4) Afterward "comes the longed-for occasion when the lady, in peril, needs a champion to defend her" (160). Of course, "the lady in peril" here doesn't so much need someone to defend her as to murder for her. 5) De Flores, of course, sues for that honor. 6) He "kills the threatening enemy, is given a further token (the ring) as a sign of favor, presses his suit, and wins the lady" (160). Jordan points out that Piracquo's murder is far from what is typical of the courtly contest, asserting that "[i]n this contest what one normally has is an open challenge and then the face-to-face armed combat, something that by Middleton's time has ossified into the code of the duel" (161). This duel is

developed as a perverted and mordantly ironic variant on a courtly love relationship" (160).

¹⁰ Jordan writes that "De Flores may actually speak of the dropped glove as a favor (I.i.231), but if the lady

exactly what Alsemero suggested he would participate in, but Beatrice-Joanna stopped him.¹¹ This is a travesty, or as Jordan also argues an inversion,¹² of the courtly romance. Finally, there is the aspect of the knight who “wins the lady,” which has been cited above. De Flores does get Beatrice-Joanna, that is true. However, the “winning” he does is not of her heart -- at least not right away -- but rather of her flesh. She says, for example, “I make thee master / Of all the wealth I have in gold and jewels; / Let me go poor unto my bed with honour, / And I am rich in all things” (3.4.159-61). De Flores, it can be argued, doesn’t so much “win” the lady but rather rapes her.

Thus it is that these parallels to the courtly romance are so grotesquely absurd or inappropriate as to partake of the ambivalence of the folk humor of that period. These two features -- humor and inversion -- when taken together are considered hallmarks of the carnivalesque. Moreover, they are not just there in a static manner in the relationship between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, but rather they are consciously employed by De Flores, who uses this process of inversion for his own purposes. Burnett points this out in his essay on masters and servants. With regard to De Flores’ use of inversion, Burnett writes: “ ‘Carnavalesque’ inversion, in fact, is not so much a characteristic of De Flores’s conduct in the play as the strategy he exploits in his drive to secure dominion” (301). However, this strategy is a strand in the folk culture: the lowering of all that is “high and mighty” for the benefit of the common folk. This is referred to as “uncrowning” and, as I will show later, this strategy does not simply apply to individuals

allows him to keep it it is not out of a nascent affection but out of revulsion” (160).

¹¹ In Act two, scene two Alsemero tells Beatrice-Joanna: “I’ll send a challenge to Piracquo instantly” (2.2.28).

¹² Jordan uses both terms, “travesty” and “inversion,” for this variant on the courtly romance that occurs in *The Changeling*. With regard to “inversion,” Jordan, for example, writes: “Professor Ornstein, as I have said, makes the basic point that there is inversion of the courtly love convention in the Beatrice--De Flores

but even has broader applications, such as the uncrowning of hell. The actual carnival, then, was a time and space to simultaneously lower and raise up. The deriding of the elites functioned to, in a sense, raise up the common folk, since lowering the high and mighty temporarily demolished the vertical sense of the societal framework and created rather a leveling. Carnival was a very specific space of time which created freedom from hierarchies, both literally in terms of upper and lower classes, and more figuratively in the sense of elevated ideology. All was lowered to the material bodily principle. The great irony is that this principle, the debasing of all glorious ideals, promoted one of the greatest of all ideals: freedom. This sense of freedom was quite specific: it allowed for celebrating the material and lower bodily principle; and by doing so it put into temporary suspension the hierarchy, since the brute facticity of the lower bodily principle pertained to all, kings and paupers alike. People were simply people and not “gentle” or “commoner” and so forth. The high ideals of religion, which can function to put great stress on the individual, were also brushed aside, and people were offered a space to embrace their physical and instinctual lives.

The carnivalesque nature of the madhouse subplot, with its correspondences in the main plot, has been dealt with in some detail. However, the richness of *The Changeling* is its polysemous nature and that it provides for multiple, often contradictory interpretive strands. According to Susan Neal Mayberry, in her essay “Cuckoos and Convention: Madness in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling*,” the two plots function to “examine the elusive nature of sanity” (21). A major contention of hers is that both plots collaborate in a meaningful way to explore the issue of sanity. She cites a number of critics who scoff at the madhouse subplot and observes that “the consensus still remains relationship” (161).

that the madhouse scenes are ‘crude, generally in bad taste, and full of extraneous farcical horse play’” (21). She notes, as other critics have as well, that the play examines the “self-destructiveness of passion” (26) and that only Isabella is able to employ reason to avoid the madness of self-destructive passion. Mayberry asserts that Isabella “is tested; but, unlike Beatrice, she makes an active choice for good” (28). While I agree with Mayberry’s main argument, my position in this paper has been that many modern readers/viewers of the play miss the carnivalesque qualities and their important function in *The Changeling*. Yes, critics pick up on the crudeness and the “farcical horse play,” but, due to their distance from the times of the first production, they don’t pick up on the carnivalesque nature of the subplot and its relevance to the work as a whole. While Mayberry highlights the way the madhouse subplot functions in examining “the elusive nature of sanity,” she does not -- it is not her project -- investigate the preponderance of the carnivalesque.

One of the most difficult aspects for the modern sensibility to understand regarding the early modern period (and Middle Ages also, I would argue, based on my reading) is the common folks’ conception of death. Death was not simply an unqualified evil, but rather was often viewed in an ambiguous, shifting way. Bristol comments on the multiple meanings that death could have for the common people in Elizabethan society:

Awareness of death and of the precariousness of day-to-day existence is pervasive in every cultural setting in Elizabethan society. In plebeian culture this awareness can give rise to a vindictive sense of pleasure and satisfaction, especially in relation to the funerals of the great and powerful. More importantly, however, death is funny because death is fundamentally ambiguous. In the context of

plebeian culture, with its constant awareness and rearticulation of “the limits of the possible,” death is never seen or represented as an isolated, individual event. Death is, on the contrary, continually reabsorbed and recycled into the rhythm of everyday life. (196)

The sense of both the humor and the vindictive pleasure death affords is prevalent in *The Changeling*. For example, not only is Alonzo killed by a servant and the woman he was to marry becomes the strumpet of his murderer, but there are grim jokes and nasty ironies layered into the scene leading to his death. On at least two occasions Alonzo refers to De Flores, the man the audience knows is planning to kill him, as “kind.” When De Flores assents to show Alonzo the strength of the castle, Alonzo says, “Thanks, kind De Flores” (2.2.167). Then when De Flores helps remove Alonzo’s weapon on the pretense it will be a hindrance in moving through a narrow passage -- which really is done for the servant’s own protection -- Alonzo again thanks De Flores. “ ‘Tis done. Thanks, kind De Flores” (3.1.7). These moments, these “nasty ironies,” highlight the ways in which death can be viewed with humor, albeit a black humor. They “carnivalize” a scene that would otherwise be one of horror.

No long afterwards in Act Three De Flores engages in verbal play with the foreshadowing of Alonzo’s death when he concurs with Alonzo’s words, “Goodly munition” (3.2.9):

Ay, there’s ordnance, sir --

No bastard metal -- will ring you a peal

Like bells at great men’s funerals; (3.2.10-12)

Alonzo, of course, is the “great man” who is dancing on the edge of his own grave. His

is the funeral that De Flores is referring to, and this provides some humor to the audience who understand the subtext of De Flores' words. Moreover, there is the taking of Alonzo's ring, finger still attached, which is rife with meanings. The bloody finger in the ring is simultaneously redolent of both cuckoldry and castration for "painfully" obvious reasons. In terms of cuckoldry it reminds the audience of Alibius' line in the first Act when he says, "I would wear my ring on my own finger: / Whilst it is borrowed it is none of mine" (1.1.27-28). This crude analogy to sexual organs and the conception of marriage that lies behind it where the wife is property -- and she (or "it") is denoted by the vagina which is symbolized by the ring -- to be controlled and enjoyed by her husband, is the very antithesis of the ideal marriage Alsemero speaks of in the beginning of the play. He waxes poetical shortly after seeing Beatrice-Joanna once again "in the temple" (1.1.1). He's obviously smitten with her and connects a future marriage to his "Beatrice" with prelapsarian times:

The place is holy, so is my intent:
 I love her beauties to the holy purpose,
 And that, methinks, admits comparison
 With man's first creation, the place blest,
 And is his right home back, if he achieve it.
 The church hath first begun our interview
 And that's the place must join us into one;
 So there's beginning and perfection too. (1.1.5-12)

Once more the inversion of high ideals takes place in *The Changeling*. Instead of Beatrice-Joanna fulfilling his lofty vision of Eve in Eden, she turns out to be, according

to the conception of the early modern times, a whore instead once De Flores has deflowered her.

Finally, with regard to being confronted with the knowledge that he, De Flores, murdered Piracquo, there is the display of, in Bristol's terms, an "extreme show of doltishness" -- doltishness in this context often referring to one who purposely "plays dumb"¹³ (179). Bristol points out that "[d]eath is treated as a laughing matter in many of Shakespeare's tragedies, as it is in the tragic drama of his predecessors and his contemporaries" (179). He cites many examples but, for the purposes of this essay, one will be sufficient. The example is drawn from *Hamlet* and it deals with the titular character's murder of Polonius. When Hamlet's uncle asks Hamlet where Polonius is, Hamlet tells him that Polonius is at supper. The king continues to question Hamlet about this remark, and Hamlet responds: "Not where he eats, but where' a is eaten" (4.3.19). Not only is death made a joke of, but so is murder. This is analogous to the comment De Flores makes in Act Five with regard to Piracquo's murder. Alsemero has already heard Beatrice-Joanna tell how she had Piracquo murdered. He then puts her in the closet when De Flores enters and confronts the servant with this intelligence.

Alsemero. My wife's behindhand with you, she tells me,
 For a brave bloody blow you gave for her sake
 Upon Piracquo.

De Flores. [Aside] Upon? 'Twas quite through him, sure. --
 Has she confessed it? (5.3.101-105)

This "extreme show of doltishness" -- even though it's specifically directed at the

¹³ Bristol discusses *Hamlet* where the Prince says: "Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (IV.iii.31). Bristol then asserts: "But murder 'Carnivalizes' social difference

audience -- makes a mockery of the solemnity of a person's death; and, even more so, provides a certain frisson of *schadenfreude*, providing a sense of pleasure at the ultimate debasement of "the high and mighty." In addition to this, there is the comical ease of manner which De Flores displays when confronted with news that one would expect to seriously disturb him. Alsemero answers when asked if his wife has confessed, "As sure as death to both of you, / And much more than that" (5.3.106-7). Still De Flores continues with an impudent insouciance. De Flores does not rail at his fate; he does not beg; he does not attempt to silence Alsemero with a blow put "quite through him." De Flores responds to this assertion that he will be executed with the quip: "It could not be much more: / 'Twas but one thing, and that is she's a whore" (5.3.106-7). This is said to the man who is Beatrice-Joanna's legal husband. De Flores' calmness then mocks the very terrors of transgression and the consequences that follow. This calmness, born from the uncrowning of the terrors which maintain the status quo, is indeed the personification of the carnival.

I will focus on the deaths of Beatrice Johanna and De Flores later. In the following paragraphs, I focus on what Bristol calls the "uncrowning of hell" (184). To understand what exactly this refers to I cite Bristol at some length below in discussing the Porter in *Macbeth* in scene 2.3. 1-6:

As the porter plays at being the gatekeeper of the inferno, we laugh at a variety of images of uncrowning: at the farmer who expected plenty, at the arrogance of those knocking to be admitted, even at the uncrowning of hell, turned into a homely place where a tailor might 'roast a goose'. The porter's hell is simultaneously hot and cold, ominous and funny, a place of

and turns a person into 'laughing matter'" (188).

feasting as well as a place of punishment: in other words it is equivocal.

(184)

Two things are of especial importance in this paragraph. First, there is the equivocal way hell is rendered. Like many aspects from the folk culture of both the medieval and early modern period, Bristol finds a readiness to accept the ambiguity, the equivocal nature of things. Thus, even death can be equivocal: while grief and horror can obtain, so can humor, *schadenfreude*, and a deep acceptance of it falling into the flow of the seasons. The ability to simultaneously accept the contrary aspects of things and a consciousness of ambiguity also allowed for a fuller, richer laughter, for the totality of the personality was able to give vent through it: a vile degrading through billingsgate, uncrowning, the ludicrous, and even death held not only the harsh and frightening sides of life, but also the comical as well. Hell, after all, was a place where one might “roast a goose.” These aspects of folk culture and carnival involved degradation and loss, but they were also forms of freedom and regeneration.

The second element of importance that appears in this passage is the notion of “uncrowning,” or what Bristol refers to as the “uncrowning of hell.” This refers to taking away the power held by the conceptual construct of the crown. The concept of “hell” was constructed over the course of centuries by the time early modern English culture developed. And the concept of “hell” had tremendous power to frighten, and thereby to shape behavior. The crown, of course, was the primary symbol of power. The king or queen wore the crown and thereby held great political power -- indeed, even the power of life and death over people. To uncrown them, then, was to remove their power. This can be cause for great celebration if one feels impotent and victimized. To uncrown hell then

is to take away the power of this fearful personified being, this tyrant which terrorizes, and by doing so, simultaneously regain power over it and thereby shed the state of victimhood.

In *The Changeling* hell is referred to on at least two occasions in the last act. Most poetically hell is alluded to by Alsemero when he tells De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna to “rehearse again / Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect / When you shall come to act it to the black audience” (5.3.114-16). In addition to this the entities which reside with the damned in pandemonium, the devils, are referred to at least once when Alsemero refers to the female sex as “cunning devils!” (5.3.108). However De Flores is suggested as the devil in the following ways. First, he is likened to the archetypal animal of Satan: the snake. In Act One Beatrice-Joanna says in reference to De Flores, “Such to mine eyes is that same fellow there, / The same that report speaks of the basilisk” (1.1.114-115). The basilisk is “a mythological serpent which could kill by its look” (1.1.115n). These three aspects, its being a serpent, its pernicious nature, and its association with myth link De Flores to the devil. Then in Act Three Beatrice-Joanna says to De Flores with tormented emotion, “Why, ‘tis impossible thou canst be so wicked, / Or shelter such a cunning cruelty” (3.4.123-124). Of course, the audience knows it is not at all impossible that De Flores can be so cruel. Again, though, the aspects cited here, wickedness, cunning, and cruelty, are all associated with the Prince of Darkness. Not long after this, when Beatrice-Joanna succumbs to De Flores’ demands, she alludes to the serpent imagery again, saying, “Was my creation in the womb so cursed, / It must engender with a viper first?” (3.4.168-169). In addition to these things it has been shown several paragraphs above how Alsemero alludes to the vision of the

Garden of Eden before the Fall and how he envisions that his life with Beatrice-Joanna could replicate this harmonious existence between man and woman. However De Flores, much like Satan in the guise of the serpent, comes between Adam and Eve, here represented by Alsemero and Beatrice-Joanna, and leads Eve astray, thereby destroying the edenic condition.

Thus it is that De Flores carries a suggestion of the devil. He has a connection to the devil and hell, though there is an equivocal treatment of them which is in keeping with the carnivalesque notion of the “uncrowning of hell.” In the madhouse subplot the audience hears a MADMAN yell out, “Catch there! Catch the last couple in hell!” (3.3.181). This refers to an “outdoor (courting) game of barley-break” in which a “couple would join hands within a marked-off, circular area called ‘hell’ and attempt to catch others as they ran through the circle” (3.3.181-2n). “Hell” then is not simply this terrifying place, but rather something that carried with it complex and equivocal notions in the folk conceptions of the times. “Hell” at times could even be used in a courting game. Later in the play De Flores refers to this game when he says, “Yes, and the while I coupled with your mate / At barley-break; now we are left in hell” (5.3.162-163).

By alluding to a courting game, he is insinuating a ludic aspect to all of his deception and unrestrained behavior. It is clear though that he does not regret any of his behavior, which included murder, fornicating, and deception -- sinful acts all. Ruining their sins and crimes are what sinners are thought to do when they approach their eternal punishment, yet De Flores doesn't express any remorse, for shortly after making the above reference he avers with regard to deflowering Beatrice-Joanna, “I thank life for nothing / But that pleasure, it was so sweet to me” (5.3.168-169). Furthermore, De Flores is shown to not

regret what he's done since right before he perishes he tells Beatrice-Joanna to "make haste" (5.3.175) to join him. In De Flores' last line in the play he says to her, "I would not go to leave thee far behind" (5.3.179). Then he dies. This transference of the ludic conception of hell as shown above from the madhouse subplot into the main plot is one further element of uncrowning, of the carnivalesque, of clearing a space of liberation from the hierarchical powers.

One of the great ironies I see in the critical literature on *The Changeling* is this: the carnivalesque, which is rife throughout the play, is almost entirely missed, and yet one element of the drama, namely the virginity test, which is a serious attempt to cohere with the naturalistic world setup in the drama, is viewed, if not exactly as carnival, at least as silly, comical, and absurd (all of which have close connections with carnival). Dale B. J. Randall in his astonishingly learned and perspicacious essay, "Some Observations on the Theme of Chastity in *The Changeling*," spends the majority of his paper that investigates various issues of chastity, its import, and the problematic nature of its treatment in the drama which wends its way through Middleton and Rowley's work, on correcting ahistorical readings of the virginity test in the play. Randall points out that critics "have tended to disapprove of the virginity testing, describing it as "fantastic," "preposterous," "ridiculous," "absurd," "funny," and "comical" (353). He lays out for the reader the long history of virginity testing from the ancient Jews to Pliny and through the 1600s, citing, for example, the work *De Relationibus Medicorum* which was "published in 1602 by a Sicilian physician named Fortunato Fedeli (1550-1630)" (354-57). Randall also makes it clear that though major scientific advances were occurring in the 17th century, there was still a substantial admixture with past habits. For example,

William Harvey first published his discovery that blood circulates through the body “six years after the composition of *The Changeling*” (365). Yet Harvey “believed in Telegony” (365). Randall mentions that Francis Bacon “still found it essential to urge people to abandon their idols of accepted authority and popular opinion” (365). Randall even points out that in the mid 1600s, “Noah Biggs, one of the more outspoken of English medical reformers, was complaining that physicians were still tied to Galen, Aristotle, and Avicenna” (365). Therefore it seems less likely to Randall that the common people of Middleton and Rowley’s time would have interpreted the virginity test as “absurd,” “fantastic,” or “preposterous.”

In addition, Randall shows the pains that Middleton and Rowley took to make the test not only workable in the drama but also believable. He argues, “the dramatists do everything they can to make us take the test seriously” (354). In the play when Beatrice-Joanna is going through Alsemero’s closet, she comes across a manuscript and says, “A merry sleight, but true experiment, the author Antonius Mizaldus” (4.1.45-46). That name, Randall points out, is based on a real person, one Antoine Mizauld: “Born in Montlucon about 1520, Antoine Mizauld went to Paris to study medicine and received a doctorate there” (359) Mizauld, who died in 1578, was a “respected and extremely industrious figure during his lifetime” (359). And while Randall informs us that Mizauld’s reputation deflated rather quickly after his death, his name still “would have been useful for alluding to out-of-the-way learning on a wide variety of matters, learning that was authority-oriented and often concerned with topics appropriate to science” (359). For the common theater-goer of the first quarter of the 17th century, this allusion, if indeed it were picked up at all, would only heighten the realistic quality of what was

occurring on stage.

The major problem for the modern reader of this play in understanding the ludic and celebratory aspects so abundant in the drama is the nature of the relationship between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores. While many critics accept that there is a great deal of ambiguity in this relationship, they still express moral compunctions about what exactly occurs there. Some critics of the play are bothered by the possibility that this relationship is based on rape. To them this relationship is so primary that most else, perhaps especially the subplot, becomes extraneous. However, this is not necessarily how the earliest audiences saw things, for Randall cites N. W. Bawcutt as asserting that “much of the play’s early success apparently derived ‘from the comic sub-plot centred on Antonio’” (348-49). For the early modern audience the subplot was apparently not by any means an extraneous, ridiculous appendage to fill up space, but rather one of the chief draws! This knowledge, of course, should act as a corrective to discarding the subplot’s function and giving isolated attention to the Beatrice-Joanna -- De Flores relationship.

However, there is far more that needs to be elucidated to show why the Beatrice-Joanna -- De Flores tandem worked somewhat differently for a Jacobean audience than for those with a modern sensibility. In “Lewd but Familiar Eyes: The Narrative Tradition of Rape and Shakespeare’s The Rape of Lucrece,” Michael Hall skillfully delineates the narrative structure that rape is based on: he relates it to the hunt, the chase. He traces the evolution of this history from narratives about hunting and then as they develop into narratives about warfare. He then explores the Lucrece story, giving particular attention to Shakespeare’s version, and showing that the “tradition through

which “The Rape of Lucrece” and most rape stories before and since are told carries with it a different, much older, and much more aggressively patriarchal message” (70). This is done by showing that Lucrece in Shakespeare’s version is a weak victim, and that she reflects (perhaps even accepts) the ideology of the times.

What is relevant in Hall’s essay for the purposes of this paper is the structure of the rape narrative and its function. Hall speaks of rape narratives being built on the form of “chase stories” (51) and writes that “[w]hether it is a case of a detective tracking down a criminal, a scientist heroically seeking a lifesaving cure . . . chases are fun because we enjoy the tension created by one character struggling to catch and overcome another” (51). Even if one identifies with the individual being pursued, the drama inherent in the situation is captivating. Clearly the pursuit of quarry is what’s occurring in both the main and subplots of *The Changeling*. In the subplot Antonio and Franciscus must “camouflage” themselves to get close enough to their quarry to have a chance of capturing her. De Flores is constantly pursuing Beatrice-Joanna in the main plot. In the first scene of the play he says, “Must I be enjoined / To follow still whilst she flies from me?” (1.1.101-102). This narrative structure then operates on us, capturing our attention with its inherently interesting issue of whether or not one character will overcome the other. This structure operated on the early modern as it does on us. In Hall’s words, “chases are fun.” There was, however, a profound difference. Hall traces the development of the form, showing that the hunt, battle, and rape narratives all have similarities: they showed one group (or sometimes an individual) doing battle with and overcoming a foe. However the purpose of this particular narrative structure he says is to solidify group identity:

Individual men could play out conquest narratives, but the reason the stories needed to be told at all was to establish group identity, and to assert the values -- such as strength, cunning, dominance, and teamwork -- that came to be associated with masculinity. So even when the stories are about individuals, the point is to reinforce male group identity. (55)

The very function of these chase and conquest stories -- whether the conquest is an animal, a group in battle, or the rape of another man's wife -- is to establish group identity and to assert those group values which enabled it to overcome the "other" and continue its survival.

Yet I don't entirely agree with Hall's assessment that these narratives existed solely to "reinforce male group identity." In literature and artwork where large scale rapes of a captured city occur, the purpose is likely to be done to reinforce and celebrate male group identity. However, these narratives are built, one must remember, on hunting narratives. When the hunters, presumably all or mostly male, succeeded in capturing their quarry, the tribe ate! These stories were celebrations, too, of the group's victory through the efforts of its men. The stories of the heroic deeds of men in warfare too could function in this respect, for clearly if one group succeeded in conquering another, then the resources of the conquered people went to the victorious group, thus promoting not only their survival but their flourishing. This was cause for the women of the conquering group to celebrate too. Therefore these conquest narratives, in addition to being inherently suspenseful, functioned to promote group identity, even giving cause for celebration when the hero of the group succeeded. It is in this point that the early modern audience differed greatly from a modern reader of *The Changeling*. The vast majority of

the populace of early modern England was not gentle born, but was rather common. De Flores, though he is a gentleman, is a character the common people could readily identify with, for he is a servant. Moreover, the animal imagery used to describe De Flores is associated with those who do agrarian labor. Both “pig” and “swine” (2.1.40-43) are used by him to describe other ugly men who yet are loved by women, thereby associating such imagery with himself. In keeping with the animal imagery associated with the labor of the land, De Flores refers to himself as a “common Garden-bull” (2.1.81). Finally, Beatrice-Joanna refers to De Flores as a “dog-face” (3.1.148). All this imagery is quite the opposite of links to nobility, which would more likely be associated with animals such as a horse or a lion, a hawk or an eagle. De Flores is common. Indeed, even his name, which has often been pointed out as a pun on “deflowerer,” is associated with the land. De Flores literally means “of or from flowers.” Flowers come from the fields, which is where the commoners labor.

By contrast, Beatrice-Joanna is a lady by birth, one whose circumstances have not been reduced: not only does she have a waiting-woman, Diaphanta, but she lives in a castle. In the very first act we learn of her palatial abode when Beatrice-Joanna is attempting to bring Alsemero into where she lives, telling her father, “And in discourse I find him much desirous / To see your castle” (1.1.162-63). Shortly thereafter, by the time that Alsemero learns Beatrice-Joanna is betrothed to another and yet is urged by Vermandero to have a tour, Alsemero says, “How shall I dare to venture in his castle / When he discharges murderers at the gate?” (1.1.226-227). Besides the above details, it is clear that she has great wealth at her disposal. After she learns that De Flores has killed Piracquo, she says that the ring which De Flores brought back, which he should

keep as part of his reward, is worth "near three hundred ducats" (3.4.45). She also offers De Flores quite a bit of money, saying "Look you, sir: here's three thousand golden florins; / [She gives him money] I have not meanly thought upon thy merit" (3.4.63-64). Beatrice-Joanna, then, is someone far above the common person in terms of birth, wealth, prestige, and living conditions. To see De Flores, a servant, pursue, get the better of, degrade and be-whore one of the elites may be a celebratory reinforcement of the commoners' group identity. Once again, there is an equivocal sense to what occurs, allowing for simultaneously oppositional interpretations. One of the interpretations is that the commoners, by De Flores' conquest, could gleefully assert that they were not simply "common Garden-bulls" or beasts of burden, but had cunning, resolution, and audacity. The commoners could uncrown the elite -- at least temporarily -- and glory in their achievement and the riches they derived from it. This deriding of the "high and mighty" -- especially when it involved the lower bodily stratum, such as sexual gratification -- was one of the chief features of carnival. It functioned as a way of creating space for freedom in an otherwise powerfully hierarchical, class structured society.

Another element strongly associated with the carnivalesque is feasting. Bakhtin is quite clear on this point. He claims that the "feast has no utilitarian connotation" (276) but rather it "means liberation from all that is utilitarian, practical. It is a temporary transfer to the utopian world" (276). While there are several references in *The Changeling* to feasts and festivities (most notably the marriage between Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero), I will adduce a couple instances which refer specifically to De Flores. Though these are slight references, they carry significant impact, for they

betray his consciousness, showing the way he connects feasting with his achievement in the drama. Indeed, the very word De Flores uses when he thinks of the recompense that awaits him for murdering Piracquo is a synonym for a feast. He says, "My thoughts are at a banquet for the deed" (3.4.18). This is a "transfer to a utopian world" (Bakhtin, 276), for not only is he going to get sexually gratified, more importantly he is going to be allowed to level those above him by becoming the master of the lady of the castle. He will not be simply a lower level piece in a hierarchy: he will be a man who must be accepted as a man. Bakhtin asserts, "[t]he banquet always celebrates a victory and this is part of its very nature. Further, the triumphal banquet is always universal" (283). It has already been shown how one of the interpretive strands in the polysemous nature of *The Changeling* is that De Flores functions as a symbol for the common people in the conquest narrative, and the banquet of which he speaks of serves as a symbol of the people's victory over the tyranny of the elite.

Though many critics speak of the overvaluation of virginity in *The Changeling*, it should be pointed out that Beatrice-Joanna's virginity is important to De Flores because of who she is, not in and of itself. When she is bitterly vexed by Diaphanta for staying so long with Alsemero on the wedding night, she turns to De Flores for help. He tells her that waiting women are "termagants" and "mad whelps" (5.1.15-17) and that Beatrice-Joanna should have asked for his assistance in this matter. He adds, "And I could have helped you to a pothecary's daughter / Would have fall'n off before eleven, and thanked you too" (5.1.21-22). The woman who was to take Beatrice-Joanna's place, it must be remembered, had to be a maid. This indicates quite clearly that procuring a maid was not in and of itself all that great a dilemma. Mastering a maiden who was gentle born, such

as Beatrice-Joanna, was a different matter; it was a far greater feat to accomplish. However, when carnivalesque aspects such as uncrowning and banqueting are kept in mind, and when these are related to De Flores' victory over Beatrice-Joanna, a whole different interpretive modality obtains. This central relationship is no longer simply a gender issue but rather takes on tones of class as well.

Another image of feasting occurs in the last scene of the drama.

De Flores, as he lays dying, gloats about his taking Beatrice-Joanna's "honour's prize" in front of her father and her husband (5.3.168). He exults with the following words:

But that pleasure, it was so sweet to me
That I have drunk up all, left none behind
For any man to pledge me. (5.3.170-73)

The reference to "pledging" suggests a banquet or a feast. That De Flores has greedily "drunk up all" is, in a sense, an uncrowning of the elites, if only a temporary one. He has not only be-whored Beatrice-Joanna but he has killed her too. Moreover, he has, if not technically, at least in essence, cuckolded Alsemero. His victory, then, symbolized by emptying the cup to its dregs, is complete. However, the very idea of a banquet or feast, as suggested by the above quote, entails a collectivity. De Flores, as suggested by the Hall essay, can represent more than a single person. Bakhtin contradicts ethnographers and folklorists by saying, "banquet images are not the vestiges of dead ages, when collective hunting was followed by collective feasts, when the defeated animal was torn to pieces and devoured" (282). This image of the banquet was alive and well, and it suggests a victory celebration. Yes, De Flores alone drains the cup to its dregs; but De Flores can be construed as representative of a group. What De Flores' banquet celebrates

is the defeat of the hunted animal, Beatrice-Joanna, and her being devoured by the victorious commoners.

To bring this essay to a conclusion requires an explication of what Bassnett claimed was one of the major aspects that critics give attention to in the drama: the moral vision of the play. It can be summed up in what Bristol refers to as “the Battle of Carnival and Lent” (73). The whole of this paper has drawn attention to and elaborated on the elements of carnival (elements that were pervasive throughout the daily existence of the people, but yet grew to greater intensification during actual festivals) which are rife within the drama. The unrestrained, lewd, sinful and licentious behaviors form a whole substratum to *The Changeling* -- and not just in the madhouse subplot. However, I have shown that there was more than simply libido involved here; there was an expression of, and drive for, dignity in the very behaviors which degraded the elites. Regarding this point Bristol writes, “[c]arnival masquerade is a language of resistance for plebian culture in its relationship to constituted authority and privilege” (72). The carnival and even the elements which comprised it, billingsgate, disguises, ludicrous classical references, uncrowning, and degrading the high and mighty, could also be put to use by plebian culture to resist “constituted authority.” This resistance takes place in the drama in numerous ways, as I have shown. However, for summation purposes, I cite the case of Antonio and Franciscus, who mislead their lord about where they are going and disguise themselves to cuckold another man. The carnivalesque aspects of that adventure have already been highlighted: disguises; feigning madness to step outside, as it were, official truth; sexual unrestraint; ludicrous classical references; and the debasing of a person of power, namely Alibius. This adventure that Antonio and Franciscus engage in though

can also be viewed as resisting “constituted authority.” Instead of simply being pawns to be used by their master, they engage in an action of their own choosing, which, in a sense, gives them dignity. They also are attempting to cuckold the lord of the asylum, which can be seen as a metaphor for debasing those in power. We’ve also seen De Flores “doltishly” misunderstand the intent of Beatrice-Joanna’s statements and act to reinterpret them as the paradigm of the courtly romance. He uses her own words and acts, arguably meant to dissuade him from accosting her, as a script for sexual dalliance.

Carnival is the antithesis of restraint. However, structure and order were required for survival. Carnival, therefore, called forth Lent, just as Lenten severity called forth carnival. Patterson cites Bawcutt who claimed that at the end of the play “moral order is finally established” (1632). I believe that statement is too simplistic for this play. It misses the perpetual flux that the play is elaborating; it misses the agon between Carnival and Lent. Alibius, the capitalist of the play, when telling Lollio about the profit that can be made by having the madmen and fools dance at Beatrice-Joanna’s wedding, alludes to this eternal agon when he says:

Could we so act it
 To teach it in a wild distracted measure,
 Though out of form and figure, breaking Time’s
 head --
 (It were no matter, ‘twould be healed again
 In one age or other, if not in this). (3.3.283-6)

This curious statement regarding “breaking Time’s head” and its healing again comes from the place in the drama that points most obviously to festival: the festivities at

Beatrice-Joanna's wedding, which will include the dancing of madmen and fools in an antemasque. In the most literal of senses carnival was a "breaking of time," for it was freedom from the requirements set by a schedule. However, there needed to be a "healing" too. That healing was the re-establishing of restraint, order, and authority.

It is interesting that Bristol points out that "[t]his reconciliation of opposites is brought about in the private and domestic sphere, more specifically in the interior space of the great hall or court" (74). While the reconciliation that does take place in the play occurs in Alsemero's room, it has the markings of a great hall or court, for it occurs in a castle and the lord of the castle is there as well as the rest of the *dramatis personae*. In contrast to the preceding action of the play, restraint and order and a more moderate authority have been established. Alsemero, when citing the changes that have occurred, points out that Tomazo is no longer seeking vengeance, no longer at enmity with the household. He says, "Your change is come too: from an ignorant wrath / To knowing friendship" (5.3.202-3). In addition to this sense of order, there are the changes that both Antonio and Franciscus admit. Both in essence acknowledge their foolishness and recognize the luck they had in escaping the gallows for their actions. Alibius has seen the errors of his ways and, while still maintaining his patriarchal authority, has moderated quite a bit. He says, "I see all apparent, wife, and will change now / Into a better husband" (5.3.212-13). And lastly, perhaps most importantly, Alsemero provides comfort to Vermandero by claiming his place as his son. "Sir, you have yet a son's duty living; / Please you accept it" (5.3.216-17). So while Vermandero has lost a daughter, he still has a son.

Thus, through the carnivalesque aspects of the drama -- a drama which is tragic in

many respects -- some very positive changes have come about. Bristol asserts the benefit of social conflict "which conserves the diffuse, implicit authority of the local community and, equally, contributes to the tradition of mutual and reciprocal responsibility for sustaining collective subsistence" (87). These positive changes such as Antonio and Franciscus gaining some wisdom and Alibius becoming a more lenient husband have been noted. Perhaps Vermandero will be a more wise and attentive lord of his castle. He says, for example, when he sees De Flores bringing Beatrice-Joanna from the closet, "An host of enemies entered my citadel / Could not amaze like this" (5.3.147-8). This remark shows just how out of touch with what was going on Vermandero has been. However, all has now been brought to light, and while great loss has occurred, he is no longer ignorant of what was happening in his own domain.

The carnivalesque aspects which are rife in *The Changeling* should not be viewed as simply moments of humor, or grim jests, or uncouth behavior, but rather as strategies of resistance and as signposts of the consciousness of the servants and common people. This is not a simple story of learning from mistakes and putting everything back to how it should be. No, this is a narrative suggesting the flow of time, the eternal agon between the celebration of resistance and the imposition of a just and modified restraint. It is a narrative of Carnival and Lent.

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